

Sample Policy for Telephone Meeting Procedure

WHEREAS, the Town/ Village of _____ (adopted)(follows)¹ the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (hereafter "RONR") as procedures for conducting meetings of the Town Board of Supervisors/Village Board of Trustees and all its committees and sub-units;

WHEREAS, RONR in Rule 9² states its rules provide only for in-person meetings unless a policy or bylaw authorizing electronic, or remote, meetings is adopted by an organization provides for electronic meetings;

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated meeting remotely to conduct Town/Village business, and other circumstances may necessitate that the Board meet remotely by electronic means;

WHEREAS, the Town/Village wishes to adopt rules to permit meetings by telephone, provide procedures for effective, fair and open meetings;

THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED by the Town/Village Board of _____ that the following Rules for Telephone Remote meetings are hereby adopted:

1. Remote meeting by telephone authorized. The Board or any of its sub-units may meet remotely by telephonic or other audio means when cause for doing so exists, such as, but not limited to, natural disasters, severe or harsh weather events, risks of infectious disease(s), war, riot or as a means to obtain a quorum. The presiding officer of the body may determine when a remote meeting shall be utilized, or a majority of the Board may so determine at a legally convened and noticed meeting of Board.
2. Definitions:
 - a. "Presiding Officer" includes the Chair/President, committee chair, commission chair or president, or any person authorized to preside over a meeting of the Town/Village governmental body.
 - b. "Member" is a supervisor/trustee or, or member of any sub-unit of the Board, including committees and commissions.

¹ Local governments often have an ordinance, resolution or a basic motion adopting RONR as its procedure for conducting meeting. Others just as a matter of practice use or just follow RONR as a matter of general, often unspoken, consensus of the governing body. If your Town or Village has some formal adoption of RONR, use "adopted" in your policy. Otherwise, use "follows." "Current edition" assumes your meetings rely on the current edition of RONR. Caution: some ordinances or policies refer to a specific edition of RONR, and in effect tie their meeting procedures to that edition unless the body amends their decision adopting RONR. "Current edition" is recommended when adopting RONR to avoid a need for technical amendments to keep meeting procedures current.

² Local governments may adopt their own procedures modifying RONR, or not use RONR at all.

- c. "Clerk" includes the Clerk, the Clerk's designee or any persons acting as a Clerk for a meeting.
 - d. "Board" is the Town/Village Board and any sub-units of the board or Town/Village Commission.
3. Login information. The Clerk shall send by e-mail to every member of the Board, and by Open Meetings Law notice [[Wis. Stat. § 19.84](#)] to the public at least 24 hours prior to the time of the meeting, the phone number(s) and unique access code(s) that that members and the public need to connect to the telephone conference call. The Clerk may also include a copy of, or a link to, these rules. The Board may provide for a place where the public may safely gather to listen to the meeting on a loudspeaker or similar device, or on the Internet or social media.
4. Call-in time. The Clerk shall schedule a telephone conference call, using a free service that provides each user the unique access code, to begin 15 minutes before the start of each meeting.
5. Arrival announcements. Members shall announce themselves at the first opportunity after joining the telephone conference call, but may not interrupt a speaker to do so.
6. Departure announcements. Members who leave the telephone conference call before adjournment shall announce their departure, but may not interrupt a speaker to do so.
7. Quorum calls. The presence of a quorum shall be established by roll call at the beginning of the meeting and on the demand of any member. Such a demand may be made following the departure of any member, or following the taking of any vote for which the announced totals add to less than a quorum.
8. Obtaining the floor. To seek recognition by the chair, a member shall address the chair and state his or her own name.
9. Motions submitted in writing. Members may submit motions to the chair in writing by uploading them to the file-hosting service and notifying the chair of the URL or download link needed to access the file.
10. Voting. Votes shall be taken by audible roll call. The presiding officer's announcement of the voting result shall include the number of members voting on each side of the question and the number, if any, who explicitly respond to abstain or acknowledge their presence without casting a vote. Business may also be conducted by unanimous consent.
11. Technical malfunctions. Each member is responsible for his or her connection to the telephone conference call; no action shall be invalidated on the grounds that the

loss of, or poor quality of, a member's individual connection prevented participation in the meeting.

12. Meeting etiquette:

- a. Members will be in responsible for muting/unmuting themselves.
- b. Members must stay muted when NOT speaking if the telephone conference platform has that capacity.
- c. No side conversations should be held between members by alternate means of communication such as message texting or email during the meeting.
- d. Members shall identify themselves prior to speaking.

13. Public attendance and participation.

- a. Public Comment for remote meetings may be precluded or conducted by means as the Board may from time to time determine.
- b. When possible, the meeting will be recorded, and the recording promptly made publicly available on social media or a website.
- c. This policy should not be used where Wisconsin Statutes or Law require a hearing unless the Board can determine a means for public access to documents, exhibits, maps and/or testimony or statements substantially similar to an in-person hearing, or as may otherwise be permitted by law.

This Policy shall be effective upon passage.

By the Town/Village Board of the Town/Village of _____

Town/Village Board Chairperson/president
Attested by

Town/Village Clerk

Prepared September 2020 by Philip Freeburg, Distinguished Lecturer, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension Local Government Education. This sample policy is based on *Sample Rules for Electronic Meetings* by Henry M. Robert III, Daniel H. Honemann, Thomas J. Balch, Daniel E. Seabold, and Shmuel Gerber, in *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, 12th Edition (2020).